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## Army Corps can't stop island parties

But authorities say they plan to monitor Gull Island festivities

By Santiago Esparza / *The Detroit News*

**HARRISON TOWNSHIP** -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will not ban the wild parties on and around Gull Island.

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The island is owned by the Army Corps, making it public property, said Army Corps of engineers spokeswoman Lynn Duerod. That means the Army cannot ban the parties, one of which is planned for Saturday.

After a meeting Tuesday morning with local police and elected officials, the Army Corps is requiring that lanes around the island be left open for officers and emergency crews during the parties. Helicopters and video cameras will monitor those who drink and drive. Those taped breaking the law face prosecution.

But that is not enough, said Susan Hiltz, executive director of the Prevention Coalition of Southeast Michigan. The coalition is leading the charge to get the parties stopped.

"It is impossible for law enforcement officers to do their job with these crowds," she said from her office in Clinton Township. "Then the (party-goers) get in their cars and drive home."

As many as 8,000 people and 1,200 boats jammed the island and waterways around it for the June event. That makes enforcing the law difficult at best, area police and elected officials said.

Although the island is in St. Clair County, Macomb County provides backup for patrols. Macomb deputies from the Sheriff's Department marine division in Harrison Township will hit the water looking for trouble.

"I am not there to ruin a person's good time," said Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel. "We just want a safe environment."

At least one Web site posts tips from past party-goers on how drunk attendees can get, ways to avoid being struck by drunken boat drivers and ways to protect boats from drunken revelers.

U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Rich Angelet of the St. Clair Shores station said the parties originally were planned by members of the auto industry looking for an annual event to blow off some steam.

The parties have morphed into huge blow-outs with no one claiming responsibility for the conduct of attendees.

A Web site dedicated to the event does not list the names of the Web site's owners. The site does list Harrison Marine Inc. of Harrison Township and The Brickhouse bar in Utica as sponsors. Officials were not available for comment.

An Aug. 28 letter from the Army states officials did not plan to cancel any parties, but chastised those who broke the law. Angelet said those caught drinking and driving face federal and state charges.

"If we catch someone driving while intoxicated, we will cancel their voyage and hand them over to the local police department," Angelet said. "It is

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dangerous enough driving a boat. Doing it while intoxicated is worse."

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